

**ACCOUNTING FOR CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE: MALE  
DISCOURSES**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT .....	1
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## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW .....

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
1.1 STUDIES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSERS .....	2
1.2 STUDIES OF RAPISTS .....	3
1.3 BELIEFS ABOUT SEXUAL MISUSE HELD BY "NORMAL" SUBJECTS .....	4
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....	5

## CHAPTER TWO: PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY .....

1. SAMPLE .....	10
a) STUDENTS .....	10
b) FORENSIC OBSERVATION CASES .....	11
2. ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES .....	12
3. OUTLINE OF THE DISCOURSES .....	13
A) EXCUSES .....	14
B) JUSTIFICATIONS .....	15

## CHAPTER THREE:

### RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .....

1. INTRODUCTION .....	19
a) STUDENTS .....	19
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	19
2. EXCUSES .....	20
2.1 PATHOLOGY .....	20
a) STUDENTS .....	20
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	22
2.2 ALCOHOL AND DRUGS .....	23
a) STUDENTS .....	23
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	24
2.3 DEVELOPMENT .....	24
a) STUDENTS .....	24
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	25
2.4 CLASS .....	25
a) STUDENTS .....	25
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	27
2.5 MEDIA .....	27
a) STUDENTS .....	27
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	29
3. JUSTIFICATIONS .....	29
3.1 VICTIM BLAMING .....	29
a) STUDENTS .....	29
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	35
3.2 DRIVE .....	36
a) STUDENTS .....	36
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	39
3.3 PRIVILEGE .....	39
a) STUDENTS .....	39
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	41
3.4 POWER .....	42
a) STUDENTS .....	42
b) FORENSIC SAMPLE .....	43
3.5 SILENCE .....	44
a) STUDENTS .....	44
b) FORENSIC PATIENTS .....	45
4. CONCLUSION .....	47

REFERENCES .....	48
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores discourses which relate to child sexual abuse and which seek to excuse or justify it. It is hypothesized that these discourses are wide-spread and are not held simply by a small minority of offenders. Similar discourses emerged in two very different groups of male subjects. The first comprised 45 male second year University of Cape Town students in the Department of Psychology in 1986, who enrolled for a gender socialization course credit option. The second consists of 26 alleged child sexual abusers admitted to Valkenberg Hospital for psychiatric observation in 1988/9. A discourse analysis methodology is used to analyse essays written by the students and transcripts of audiotaped groups in which they participated, as well as accounts of the alleged offence contained in the clinical records of the observation cases. Ten discourses, relating to excuses or justifications for child sexual abuse, were identified by their repeated occurrence in the research material. Identified justifications of child sexual abuse are victim blaming, the belief that men are unable to control their sexual drive, the assertion of power, perceived rights over women, and doubting the evidence of girls and women. Illustrations of these discourses, which are present in both students' essays and groups, as well as in the alleged offenders' accounts, are discussed. These five discourses appear to be pervasive and may be indicative of generally held beliefs which relate to the different positions in which men and women are placed in society.

# CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The sexual abuse of children is a subject which has become widely publicised and is causing increasing concern. It is also an area subject to talk, in efforts to produce "common sense" explanations for it. Lay people attempt to attribute reasons to it - possibly in order to feel in control. Media coverage, for example, as in the recent Van Rooyen case, does increase public awareness but at the same time it tends towards sensationalisation and it serves to entrench misconceptions about sexual misuse.

Ideas about child sexual abuse held by the general public in South Africa have not, to the researcher's knowledge, been studied. In Boston, Finkelhor, 1982, studied 521 parents, and found that most subjects thought that offenders were strangers to the child, and attributed their sexually abusive behaviour to mental illness. Baker & Duncan (1985), however, found that 49% of child sexual abusers were known to their victims, and Russell (1983), found in her sample that the figure was 60%. The idea of the mentally ill child sexual abuser also appears to be pervasive, and will be discussed in detail at a later stage.

### 1.1 STUDIES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSERS

There is a wealth of professional literature on the subject of child sexual abuse, including many psychological studies. Studies such as those by Gale, Thompson, Moran & Sack (1988) and Gold (1986), are mainly concerned with the possible effects of sexual abuse on children. [For a more comprehensive review of the literature available, refer to Brown & Finkelhor (1986)]. The implications of these studies have been discussed in depth by Levett (1989a).

Relatively little work has actually taken into account the offender's point of view. Some have attempted to account for their motivation. Howells (1979), suggested a fear of sexual contact with adults. Weeks (1985) postulated that child sexual abusers were motivated by sentimental images of children, and Finkelhor (1979), examined needs for closeness or aggression in these men. Other studies have attempted to account for the offender's actions by searching for pathology in the offenders or in their families.

Weinberg (1955), distinguished between psychopathic child sexual abusers, who treat people as sexual possessions, and paedophiles, whose psychological immaturity results in their fixating on children.

Seghorn, Prentky and Boucher (1987) examined the incidence of childhood physical and sexual abuse in a sample of incarcerated rapists and child molesters. They found the incidence to be higher than that reported in the literature, but that when sexual assault did occur, it was associated with many other indices of family instability. Overholser and Beck (1986) assessed rapists, child molesters and 3 control groups on measures of heterosocial skills, hostility, impulsivity and attitudinal variables. They found heterosocial skills deficits in the rapists and child molesters relative to control groups and that child molesters were characterized by highly stereotyped views of sex role behaviour.

The difficulty with these studies is that implicit in them is the suggestion that children are only sexually abused by abnormal men, who can be distinguished from other men. Also, in their attempt to explain sexual abuse by finding pathology within individuals or their families, they lose sight of the fact that sexual abuse of children is most frequently perpetrated by a male, with the victim being female (Russell, 1983). This fact needs to be understood within the context of gender-related positioning in a society as a whole. By focussing on difficulties experienced by the offender, the researchers miss the nature of sexual abuse as a wider societal phenomenon. This phenomenon is subject to the myths and stereotypes which characterize gender-related interactions, and which are frequently applied to the sexual abuse of adult women. (Because this study is concerned with the abuse of female children and how this relates to gender-related stereotypes, the word children will refer to female children. This does not, however, suggest that the researcher ignores the fact that boys are also sexually abused.)

## **1.2 STUDIES OF RAPISTS**

Studies on rape have also tended to concentrate on the victim rather than the offender. There have, however, been several studies on the rapists themselves; (e.g. Curtis, 1976; Ben-David, 1979; Groth, Burgess & Holstrom, 1977; Groth, 1979; Rada, 1978.). Other studies have explored sexual abusers' or rapists' motivations in relation to prevalent gender-related discourses. For example, Scully and Marolla (1984) analysed the excuses and justifications which a sample of incarcerated rapists used in order to explain themselves and their crimes. Excuses consisted of appeals to forces outside their control, which

"compelled" them to rape. Justifiers attempted to present their own behaviour as situationally appropriate, and to use a number of common rape stereotypes, to make their victims appear culpable. The researchers demonstrate how these excuses and justifications allowed the offenders to view themselves as either non-rapists or "ex-rapists". Finally, through narrative accounts by convicted rapists, the researchers explore the rapists' own perceptions of their crime.

The researchers make use of Scott and Lyman's (1968) concept of accounts as a tool to analyse and explain the vocabularies of motive which the group of rapists used to present themselves and their actions. They found that by and large, deniers used justifications while the admitters used excuses. However, in some cases both groups relied on the same themes, stereotypes and images. These can be viewed as common-sense explanations which are wide-spread, and which could be considered to appear in the case of the sexual abuse of children, as well as the rape of adult women.

In the South African context, research on the child sexual abuser is unavailable and little has been done on the rapist. An important study has been carried out by Vogelmann (1987, 1990), who interviewed 27 men, among them rapists, from Riverlea, a "coloured" township near Johannesburg. On the basis of his interviews, he examines commonly held myths about rape, and the way in which they have penetrated the minds of those interviewed. He also demonstrates the way in which their belief in such myths allowed the men in his sample to interpret their actions as excusable or only slightly wrong; this can be seen to be linked to their attitudes and behaviour towards the rape victim and towards women in day to day life.

### **1.3 BELIEFS ABOUT SEXUAL MISUSE HELD BY "NORMAL" SUBJECTS**

While such work is useful, it is important to note that, according to Amir (1971), sexual offenders do not form a distinct pathological group. It is possible that the myths and stereotypes discussed by Scully & Marolla and by Vogelmann, in relation to the rapists in their samples, are widely held, and relate to the way in which women and girls are positioned in our society. For this reason, research into beliefs about rape and the sexual abuse of children held by "normal" subjects is also important and can have far-reaching implications. For example, studies on male college students show a positive correlation between attitudes condoning rape and men's self-reported likelihood of raping, using sexual force and engaging in other violence against women. These attitudes were similar to those held by rapists. (See



Malamuth, 1981, 1986.). Rapaport and Bukhart (1984) report similar findings of sexually aggressive attitudes in students.

In South Africa, Mina (1985) and Gould (1988) have both examined attitudes towards rape held by samples of adolescents in Newlands East, a "coloured" township near Durban, according to the extent to which they subscribe to popular myths about rape. Levett (1989a,b) has examined discourses of child sexual abuse in the writing and talk of female students and has demonstrated the way in which these serve to control and limit their behaviour. As far as can be ascertained, no researcher has specifically addressed the issue of discourses of child sexual abuse in relation to male students.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study aims to suggest and interpret a set of themes occurring in the talk and writing of male subjects, which exemplifies the ways in which dominant discourses explain and justify the sexual abuse of children. It draws upon theories about ideology and subjectivity. These are extremely complex, and the limited scope of this thesis does not allow for their examination here, or for an explanation of the way in which discourses come into being or are disseminated from one subject to another. The interested reader could refer to the work of, for example, Foucault (1970), (1979) and Althusser (1971).

The application of these theories to Psychology has been explored by Henriques et al (1984). In their study, the concept of 'discursive practices' is developed, to explain the constitution of the subject. Their work also draws on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which views individuals as a mixture of subjectivities locked in common-sense understandings and played out in social practices. [For further discussion of this, see Femia, 1987.]

Developing this concept, Henriques et al explain the idea that "significations are produced and lived in everyday practices and social relations, and that subjects are constituted and located as part of these practices." (Henriques et al; 1984, p.98). Everyday practices are seen as being made up of discourses, which refer to a regulated system of statements which delimits what could be said about a particular subject. These statements are contradictory and complex, and it is within their contradictory nature that the possibility of change exists. Thus, instead of searching for "facts", as one might if one held a notion of

scientific objectivity, it is necessary to examine "what principles of intelligibility are at work, what calculations of effect and consequences are made, and what discourses and practices are thought to participate in the construction of the statements of the discourse." (1984, p.98).

These authors see power as being invested in discourse. They explain that this is complex in that discursive practices produce, maintain or play out power, and its success depends on the willing compliance of the subject. Subjects are thus seen as having some investment in the power relations within which they are constituted - whatever position this might be - and power relations are maintained by this investment. In addition, because discourses and subjectivity are seen as contradictory, a person can be seen to be positioned within several different subject positions, and power relations may alter according to the different positions. For example, a man may be positioned as worker, father and husband - each of which demands different behaviour which may be conflicting.

This can be related to positions within gendered subjectivity. Within patriarchy, men and women are positioned in power in relation to each other. They can be said to have an investment in such positioning - depending on the ways in which they have been taught to take up such positions, the gains they receive from the assumption of such positions and the difficulties involved if they were to deviate. One way in which this gender- positioning takes place is in relation to the way in which men and women are positioned in the discourse of child sexual abuse. It is likely that there will be a greater need in men to find justification for the abuser and blame the victim, while women are more likely to be invested in identification with the victim.

In studies on rape, Calhoun, Selby and Warring (1976), for example, found that more men than women see the victim as contributing to or causing the rape. Malamuth, Haber and Feshbach (1980) found that women were more sympathetic to rape victims, less likely to justify the rapist through blaming the victim, and less inclined to believe that the victim derived pleasure from the rape. Malamuth (1981) found that men were more supportive of rape than women and more likely to find justification for the rapist. Mina (1985) in the study already mentioned, found that more boys than girls tended to blame the victim's behaviour either in terms of dressing seductively or of acting dangerously. Also, more boys than girls believed that only "cheap" women are raped. Gould (1988) found that more boys than girls saw rape as being the woman's fault, or attributed it to flirtatiousness on her part.

Much psychological research into women's oppression has examined the way in which people are socialized into the roles of "typical" men or women, who react to each other within a particular power structure. (See Lloyd & Archer, 1976, and Oakley, 1972.) Such methods of research:

*"in the end... only make sense if one accepts certain basic presuppositions about the person concerning the rational, unitary, individualized subject."*  
(Henriques et al (1984), p.117).

Such research methodology fails to examine the way in which subjects are positioned within discourses, and are locked into a common sense understanding, or view the world as "natural" in an uncritical way.

Feminist research into socialization is also problematic. For example, in Dworkin's (1981) work on pornography, she analyses what she refers to as male supremacist ideology which she views as having several tenets: male entitlement, the celebration of male physical strength, the inculcation of fear into women, the power of naming, the power of owning, the power of money and the power of sex. While this is useful, it sees power in the hands of men, and fails to see the way in which men are also locked within discourses, and the way in which women are invested within the particular power-related positions within which they are constituted.

While studies drawing on a humanist understanding of a rational unitary individualized subject would view change as stemming from the individual's will or choice, within a theory of subjectivity, the possibility for change can be seen to be located within the sites of contradiction between discourses. In addition, such an approach makes the notion of objectivity impossible. Thus, in this study, the researcher views herself also as a gendered subject positioned within gender-related, but also many other discourses, and thus unable to distance herself from them. The researcher's choice of focus can be related to her own positioning within discourses. In choosing such a focus, the researcher acknowledges the myriad of ways in which subjects are positioned in relation to each other. Such a study is beyond the scope of this thesis, but provides possibilities for much useful research.

Wendy Hollway (1984), concentrates specifically on gender-related issues, and delineates several discourses and gender-related positions within these. She argues that discourses make positions available to be taken up in relation to other people, and that the meaning and values which attach to everyday practices within which discourses are constituted limits the power through which someone can position him/herself in relation to the discourse as a system of reference and in relation to other people. (Wendy

Hollway, 1984. p.227) Hollway explains how the same occurrence can be understood in different ways by different individuals. She views this not as a different attitude or as a result of socialization, but rather as influenced by the discourses within which the individual is positioned, their gendered subjectivity and their psychological investment in taking up a particular position.

In considering the way in which gendered subjects are constituted in everyday practices, it is useful to take into account the way in which everyday occurrences are explained. In constructing the social world, we attribute causes to our own behaviour and to that of others. Attribution theory considers the way in which this occurs, and the way in which accounts will be offered for an offence which has occurred. Accounts of propriety, for example, consider whether an action can be considered excusable or justifiable, thus attributing responsibility to an action.

According to Austin (1961) (as quoted in Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.75), when someone is accused of behaving in a bad or untoward way, two alternative strategies are open to the person: the person may provide a justification or give an excuse. Austin distinguishes between the two on the following basis: excuses admit that the relevant act was bad in some way, but claim that the performance was influenced or caused by some external agency; justifications do not involve the denial of responsibility, instead they claim certain actions are good, sensible or at least permissible under the circumstances. It is important to note that both excuses and justifications are seen as "highly conventional acts... they take certain standard forms and are couched in certain socially approved vocabularies" (Mills, 1940, quoted in Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.76). Potter & Wetherell continue by pointing out: "the point is that people are not inventing these excuses anew, but are drawing from a range of pre-existing resources." (1987, p.76).

In providing common sense explanations for behaviour, Jones & Nisbett (1972) point out that there is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, thus avoiding responsibility, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions. What is particularly interesting is the fact that this may alter in the case of inter-group attributions, in which case a person attributes the behaviour of another person not simply to individual characteristics or intentions, but to characteristics or intentions associated with the group to which the other belongs. (Hewstone and Jaspars, 1982) This process is seen as acting to preserve and protect stereotypes of the 'in'-group and the 'out'-group, justifying existing inter-group divisions, and playing a role in the development, maintenance and reduction of inter-group conflict (Hewstone, 1988). Thus members of a

particular group can be understood as having an investment in explaining their behaviour in terms of attributing blame to members of another group, thus protecting their own positioning.

Applying this theory to discourses of child sexual abuse, it would appear likely that men who have not committed any such offence would draw on the same socially approved behaviours in explaining sexual abuse, thus providing explanations which place the blame on attributions of the offender which they do not share, or instead, by placing the responsibility on the victim, thus protecting the interests of the group to which they belong.

The implications of this are severe if one considers the conclusions of researchers like Burt (1980, 1983) who contends that a culture that supports rigid sex roles and male dominance, generates rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs that act as psychological releasers or neutralizers, allowing potential rapists to turn off social prohibition against injuring or accusing others. This relates to the work of Sanday (1981) who performed a cross-cultural study and found a higher incidence of rape in societies which devalued women and espoused rape- supporting myths.

It would appear that in relation to the sexual abuse of children, men are caught within a contradictory position: it is outlawed by societal laws, punishable as a crime and regarded as unjustifiable. Nevertheless, their potential investment in male supremacy may position men in the role of being able to see justifications for sexual misuse of women and girls, and thus in the roles of potential sexual offenders. There are no easy answers as to why men sexually abuse children specifically. It would seem, as will be discussed later, that female children, as gendered subjects, are positioned within discourses related to sexual abuse in the same way as are adult women. Arguably, their powerless position as children leaves them doubly vulnerable as they are even less likely to be able to resist or to be believed, than are adult women.

## CHAPTER TWO: PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

This study aims to identify and discuss discourses related to the sexual abuse of children, which emerge in the talk and writing of male subjects.

### 1. SAMPLE

The subjects in this study comprise samples from two different populations: male second year Psychology students from the University of Cape Town, and alleged child sexual abusers referred to the Forensic Unit at Valkenberg Hospital for psychiatric evaluation.

#### a) STUDENTS

The sample of male undergraduate students comprises 45 men who enrolled for the Gender Socialization option as part of their second year Psychology course at the University of Cape Town in 1986. (See Levett, 1989a, pp 191-193) Their ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-one, with 73% in the nineteen to twenty-one year age range. The men are predominantly white, while five are "Coloured" and two are Black. The researcher is aware of the problematic nature of these categories, but believes their use to be necessary due to their reality within present-day South Africa, in which people are divided and subject to differing experiences as a result.

93% of the students are middle class, 84% are Christian and 80% grew up in a city. Enrolment in the course was optional and no mention of sexual abuse was made initially, (to prevent the possibility of a self selected sample with some bias.). Participants were free to leave the course at any time without repercussions. The course comprised a series of four 45 minute leaderless group discussions, where male and female students were separated into same sex discussion groups. The groups were audiotaped. No researcher or staff member was present, to alleviate the possibility of influencing the discussion. The

material from the first three sessions is irrelevant to this particular study. In the fourth session of the group, the students were asked to discuss the following question:

*"Given the powerful norms against the sexual misuse of children, what personal justification could be used by men who initiate such activity?"*

Illustrations from the audiotaped fourth session of the groups will be examined in this thesis. There was a total of 9 groups, with 4-6 members in each. The audiotapes of 5 of these groups, involving 23 men, were transcribed, and will be examined in this thesis. The audiotapes of the remaining 4 groups could not be transcribed due to poor quality. One month after the final meeting of the groups, the same men were required to write brief (maximum 5 pages) essays on the topic discussed in session 4. These were not marked. The students were aware that they would be used for research purposes and confidentiality was ensured. All the students' material comprises part of a much larger amount of research material gathered by Levett (1989a) for her doctoral thesis. Although she has analysed equivalent material from female students in the same student population in detail, material from male students has not as yet been analysed.

#### **b) FORENSIC OBSERVATION CASES**

The second sample comprises 26 men admitted to Valkenberg Hospital for forensic assessment on charges of sexually abusing female children during the period 1 July 1988 - 1 July 1989. Forensic cases are sent by the courts for thirty days' observation under Sections 77, 78 and 79 of the Criminal Procedures Act, when there is some doubt as to their fitness to stand trial. This commonly arises because of an offence which is thought to be bizarre, a previous history of treatment for mental illness, or inappropriate behaviour during court proceedings. Assessment covers two primary concepts: competence to stand trial (i.e. to follow the court proceedings and to make a proper defence) and criminal responsibility. The latter refers to the capacity of the accused to appreciate the wrongfulness of a criminal act, and the ability to act in accordance with this knowledge at the time of the alleged offence. Mental illness can affect the ability to meet both of these criteria. (See Zabow, 1989, Kruger, 1980) These men have therefore not been found guilty of their alleged offences, although they may have appeared in court.

87% of the men in the present sample are working class men. 15 are "Coloured", 3 are Black and 8 are white. Their ages range from 18 to 49, with the average age being 31. The ages of children allegedly sexually abused by the men in the sample ranged between 2 and 16. The mean age was 7. Alleged offences were public indecency, indecent assault, attempted rape, and rape. 69% of the men knew their victims and 19% of these were relatives, belying the myth that girls can rely on the men they know to protect them from those they do not. A further 4 men, who were also admitted during this time period, were found to be mentally ill and unfit to stand trial. They were excluded from the final sample on the grounds that the person's delusions or hallucinations might have affected his account of the alleged offence.

The men's accounts of the alleged offence, as recorded in their folders, were examined. Traditionally, these are written more or less verbatim by the clinician, and the accused is asked to describe what happened on the day of the offence. The texts are therefore a final product, subject to the way in which the accused chooses to present himself to the clinician, and the way in which the clinician might choose to select, focus, or elicit information from the accused. In addition, audiotaped interviews were conducted with two of the forensic cases, who, during the researcher's two - month placement at the Forensic Unit, represented those who were considered fit to stand trial and who were willing and able to give an account of their alleged offence to the researcher. Both interviewees were asked to explain what happened on the day on which they were arrested. The researcher intervened as little as possible, only occasionally asking clarifying questions. These tapes were transcribed verbatim.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSES

The methodology used was a discourse analysis approach, following Hollway (1984) and Levett (1989a). This needs to be distinguished from a content analysis, which would involve fitting the data into already defined and discrete categories. For a fuller discussion of the distinction between the two approaches, see Potter and Wetherell (1987 pp.173-174). Instead, informed by theoretical and ideological issues on the subject of child sexual abuse, the researcher read the students' essays and group transcripts repeatedly. From this it was possible to identify thematic categories which referred to discourses, and which emerged repeatedly in the written and spoken material.



Because discourses are constantly changing and are not discrete categories, several of the statements referred to different discourses. Others contained contradictions. Statements were also not considered to be clearly defined entities, like, for example, sentences, but referred to a unit of text of indeterminate length which contained an idea related to a discourse. A total of 10 thematic categories referring to discourses emerged in this way. It is acknowledged that there are a number of other discourses which might have been identified. The discourses which were identified can be related to the fact that literature on sexual misuse is itself representative of a number of discourses which informed the researcher in embarking on this research, and within or in relation to which she is positioned as a clinical psychology intern and an academic.

In the case of the students' essays, statements were transcribed under a number of headings referring to discourses on separate sheets of paper. These headings were not pre-determined, but were used to refer to repeatedly recurring themes in the case material. To a large extent, they were determined by the nature of the material. Thus, some of the headings originally used after having read a few essays were abandoned in favour of others referring to themes which turned out to appear more frequently in the essays. A total of 77 hand-written pages of statements was collected in this way, and this comprised the text on which this research focussed. Transcripts from the groups were read subsequent to this, and sections which referred to discourses identified were marked. To facilitate discussion, approximate percentages of relative weighting given to each discourse in the students' statements were calculated. Because of the varied length of the statements, as well as the fact that statements referred to more than one discourse, this must be viewed as merely a very rough guideline. For this reason, they will not be presented in tabular form.

The alleged offenders' accounts were also read and examined for excuses or justifications. These were also noted under thematic categories, referring to discourses, on separate sheets of paper. The main focus of this study is not to compare the two groups of subjects, but rather to focus on common discourses which emerge in the talk and writing of both, and which can be said to contribute to and reflect male discourses surrounding child sexual abuse.

### **3. OUTLINE OF THE DISCOURSES**

The students' statements can be divided into two very broad categories: excuses and justifications, following Austin (1961). For the forensic cases, their task is to excuse or justify their actions in such a

way that their act may be deemed socially acceptable, (justified), or at least excusable, given the circumstances under which it was committed. Arguably, in selecting what excuses and justifications might be socially accepted, they draw on a body of "common sense" explanations available to any person having an ordinary conversation according to socially approved vocabularies.

It was hypothesized that the university students would draw on the same body of "common sense" explanations in offering hypothetical excuses and justifications in their group discussions and essays. It was also expected that these explanations would draw on concepts of gender-related positioning within society. It was therefore also hypothesized that the types of excuses and justifications offered by both groups of men would reflect common discourses related to the power-related positioning of women and men in contemporary society.

## **A) EXCUSES**

In offering excuses, pathology is sought either in the society within which the individual functions, or within the individual himself. The following categories of excuses were most prevalent in the students' essays:

1) **Pathology** - statements reflecting the conception that only men who are in some way abnormal sexually misuse children. Studies on rape [see Amir,(1971) and Malamuth (1980)], have shown that the rapist does not form a distinct pathological group and is not likely to be deviant. Because studies on child sexual abusers appear to show many different aspects of motivations and characteristics, it appears that the same may be the case with these men. The idea of the pathological child sexual abuser confines the problem to a small sector of the population, and is likely not to be accurate.

2) **Alcohol** - Allied to this are statements excusing the offender on the basis of his being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and as a result behaving in an uncharacteristic way when he sexually abuses. This takes the responsibility away from the offenders. It allows them, as Scully and Marolla (1984) found, to see themselves as "nice guys" who had a lapse for which they cannot be blamed.

3) **Development** - Statements excusing the offender's action on the basis that he was sexually abused as a child. This is an idea predominant in the literature, including the psychological literature on the topic. Because of the relative rarity of sexual abuse of males, particularly when compared to that of women and girls, it appears to be a convenient way of avoiding identification with the offender as well as locating pathology within a few men. (Those who were not sexually misused are, by implication, immune from doing this). The contradiction inherent in this view is that, were the correlation to be viewed as causative, as it so often is, it fails to explain the fact that there is almost no sexual misuse of children by women - and many women have been sexually misused as children themselves. (see Levett, 1989b).

4) **Class** - Statements suggesting that only those from lower socio-economic classes sexually misuse children. This is likely to serve a distancing function for predominantly white, middle class men.

5) **Media** - Statements referring to the effect which the media has on men who sexually misuse children. Researchers e.g. Dworkin (1981), Russell (1984), have been concerned about the potential effects of depictions of sexual violence towards women in the media. Malamuth and Check (1981) found that male college students who had been exposed to media in which violence against women was condoned were more likely to accept such behaviour.

## **B) JUSTIFICATIONS**

1) **Victim Blaming** - Statements which blame the victim for the incident. The idea of a child seductress can be found in the professional literature on child sexual misuse. Finkelhor (1979), reviews literature which views children as possessing attributes which encourage sexual abuse. Herman (1981) looks at similar stereotypes in literature on father - daughter incest. Levett's (1989a) study, based on a sample of female 2nd year Psychology students at UCT, examines the limitations and prohibitions placed on the way in which women act and behave, through which means they are taught that they can avoid possible sexual abuse.

From the text of their male contemporaries, similar expectations about the behaviour and dress of women and female children, which are restrictive and prohibitive, were expected to emerge. These restrictions can also be seen as a means of avoiding exposure to sexual misuse, as any transgressor of these boundaries

is seen as deserving sexual misuse, thus justifying the act and shifting responsibility from the offender onto the victim. Scully and Marolla (1984), found that the rapists in their sample:

*"tried to demonstrate that their victims were willing, and, in some cases, enthusiastic participants. In these cases the rape became more dependent upon the victim's behaviour than on their own actions." (1985,p.534)*

They point out that the deniers, through justification, constructed a "controversial" rape, and attempted to demonstrate that their behaviour, even if not quite right, was appropriate in the situation. Their denial was buttressed by the cultural view of men as sexually masterful". Victims were blamed in some way, by recourse to drawing on societal myths about rape. The following myths were drawn upon:

- a) She was seductive and wanted it (women mean "yes" when they say "no").
- b) She got what she deserved (punished for her provocative behaviour.).
- c) Nice girls don't get raped (destroying the victim's reputation by pointing to her emotional state or drug usage,etc.). These myths can be seen to be held within the victim blaming discourse.

2) **Drive** - This discourse holds that men have an uncontrollable sexual drive - once aroused they cannot control themselves and must be sexually satisfied. For example Mina (1985) found in a group of adolescents that 73% believed that sexual offenders are sexually starved, and 82% believed that they are motivated by lust. This belief is closely allied to the attribution of blame to the victims of sexual misuse, thus freeing the perpetrator from accepting responsibility. It is what Wendy Hollway (1984) refers to as the sexual drive discourse, which is part of a pervasive hegemonic discourse.

*"This discourse is an important aspect of the constraints on women to follow specific codes of conduct, the responsibility for sexual abuse or assault is shifted onto girls and women in direct consequence of such beliefs about male sexual drives." (Levett, 1989a, p. 282).*

The sexual drive discourse is not seen as occurring spontaneously, but rather in response to a woman or girl. Male sexuality thus becomes the responsibility of the woman or child - they must take steps not to arouse him or they - or another woman - are expected to bear the consequences, because the man becomes out of control and cannot help himself. Thus control becomes the prerogative of women rather than men, and the man is viewed as exempt from blame for acting on whatever impulse she/they might arouse in him.

3) **Privilege** - Statements in which men refer to what is seen as their right to sexual intercourse, even if this means abusing women and girls. The discourse of privilege reveals the contradictions behind the warnings and admonitions which seek to control female behaviour and which women and girls espouse in order to avoid "stranger danger". (See Levett, 1989a) It reveals the danger inherent in, and the possibility of, sexual abuse by the men who are closest to girls and women - because their belief of rights over women in their families place them into the roles of most likely sexual offenders.

4) **Power** - Sexual abuse as a means of asserting power over women and children. e.g. Groth & Burgess (1977) found that 55-65% of rapists in their sample were motivated by power. Child sexual abusers are not necessarily weak and passive, as is sometimes believed. Langevin (1985) found groups of imprisoned child sexual abusers to be violent and needing to dominate. Jackson (1982) refers to child molesters and rapists as having learned to express their sexuality through aggression and to seek power over others. This, however, could be related to other men, and authors such as Brownmiller, (1975), have suggested the ways in which sexual aggression and power are linked in society in general.

5) **Silence** - Related to the discourse of power are a number of statements suggesting the unreliability of women and girls as witnesses. Because of this, women and girls may be more reluctant to report sexual abuse. And if they do, there exists a body of myths which undermine their accounts in favour of believing the perpetrator. These means of silencing women and girls, or of positioning them as unreliable, were also examined.

In addition, statements which reflect the contradictions within which men can be placed, by being both those who make the laws which outlaw the sexual abuse of children, and the very people who perpetrate such acts, are examined. These are considered within the sections on the discourses to which they refer. These statements are considered important, as they represent the tension which exists between discourses. Sites of resistance, indicated by statements which attempt to undermine or negate the discourses identified, and which are important indicators of potential change, are also included.

In discussing the data, each discourse is initially examined separately. It is, however, important to note that the statements could have been clustered in different ways. Also, the categories should not be seen as discrete, but on the contrary, as interlinked, since many statements included elements which could have been included within several discourses. In addition it is possible that in the research material other

discourses, not represented here, are present. The discourses identified in this study, while they appear to be dominant, do not necessarily fully represent social reality.

In the discussion of each group of statements, examples of typical statements are selected, as well as those which are more complex in nature. Illustrations from the group discussions are also used, and the students' statements are linked to those of the forensic cases. As a result of the limited length of this document, relatively few illustrations were used, and thus they represent a small, if representative, proportion of the body of information which comprises the text. All statements, whether from students in their essays or group discussions, or from forensic cases, are tagged to facilitate identification. Extracts from students' essays are numbered from 96 to 141. These numbers refer to the student concerned. Exerpts from groups are identified by the letters A, F, M, W or Z. These refer to the group concerned. Comments on the groups are included in square brackets, and the code [in...] is used when sections of the groups are inaudible. Forensic cases are numbered F1 - F26, and extracts from their accounts are numbered accordingly. The transcribed statements and the tapes have been filed for safe-keeping.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

### 1.INTRODUCTION

The outcome of the discourse analysis will be discussed under two major headings : "Excuses" and "Justifications". The ten discourses, five of which fall under each of these, will be discussed under these headings.

#### a) STUDENTS

81% of the essays contained some statement which expressed disagreement with the sexual misuse of children, and students stated strongly that they would never consider this. There was only one self-disclosure of having sexually abused a child, which contains a number of excuses and justifications very similar to those offered by the other students. One other student admits that he has fantasized about sexually misusing a child, but would never actually do it. Compared to the high level of disclosure of sexual misuse by their female contemporaries (Levett, 1989b), only two essays referred to experiences of sexual misuse and these were second-hand. Identification tended to be with the offender rather than with the child. Despite the student's alignment with societal norms which are against sexual misuse of children, they are nevertheless able to draw on a number of excuses and justifications which represent discourses within which the sexual abuse of women and girls is generally explained and justified.

The investment which these men have in excusing and justifying child sexual misuse is addressed by one of the groups:

- Generally when it comes to justification, I think we (always) try to take the blame away from ourselves.
- You can always blame someone else, I would say.
- Or blame some other thing.
- Apart from that I don't think any man can produce personal justification that will be accepted by [anyone] He might try and fool himself into believing something, and...
- And [in...]
- And the funny thing is, we pretend to be moralistic ourselves, and we've been doing that in our discussion, I've noticed. (W)

The way in which these men's female contemporaries are similarly invested in these discourses has been explored by Levett (1989a).

## **b) FORENSIC SAMPLE**

Of the 26 men in the forensic sample, 46% denied their alleged offence, while 54% admitted it. Of the deniers, 91% in some way implicated the children and / or women involved by questioning their account of the alleged offence, or by suggesting that they provoked it in some way. 25% of the deniers used the excuse of being drunk. Of the 54% of men who admitted to the alleged offence, 57% blame the children involved by suggesting that they asked for it in some way. A further 29% used the use of alcohol as an excuse for their actions, thus avoiding taking responsibility, while 14% gave no reason for their actions. The types of excuses and justifications offered by the student and the forensic samples will be discussed under separate headings in the sections which refer to the discourses identified.

## **2. EXCUSES**

Approximately 27% of the categorized statements offered excuses of some kind. These serve the function of allowing the men to distance themselves from the hypothetical offender, by seeking causes located within him, his family or social circumstances, in a similar way to that in which the female students sought pathology in the individual victim in order to save themselves from identification with her. (Levett, 1989a, p.279). With the exception of alcohol, excuses were not used as frequently by the forensic sample.

### **2.1 PATHOLOGY**

#### **a) STUDENTS**

Drawing on exposure to the discourses of academic and particularly psychological literature in the area, 10% of the categorized statements comment on the pathology of the offender, This allows the students



to distance themselves from identification with him, because the offender is seen as belonging to a group very different from their own:

- 1. I think it is important to realize that these men are I think already disturbed before the offence occurs. Something must be wrong (mentally) to motivate these actions. (105)*
- 2. He could either use a temporary insanity plea or insanity through, example "hearing little voices in his head when told to commit such an act." (97)*
- 3. Because these people are usually emotionally and possibly permanently unstable, their justification although weak could usually hold ground. (140)*
- 4. I feel that men who abuse children sexually in some way do not measure up to the societal norms of society i.e. they are probably not the competitive, adventurous and successful achievers all men are supposed to aspire to. (110)*
- 5. The sexual misuse of children is a 'sickness' - I see that - and thus a cure is needed. (111)*
- 6. I regard all men, who seek intercourse with children as sick people who require some sort of treatment or therapy. (138)*

Apart from many similar statements, there are two which question how commonly sexually abusers are "mentally ill." For example:

- 7. Although there are psychological conditions like schizophrenia which can account for sexual misuse of children, there are but a small number in relation to the general amount of such acts being committed. (120)*

One group addresses the contradiction posed by this belief, and solves it by questioning the statistics about sexual abuse:

- Well in terms of our society what type of man gets involved in that sort of thing? Somebody who is sick, somebody who is mentally not there.*
- It's just that.. I mean if these figures are right: one in six females under the age of eighteen..*
- That means a lot of people aren't right...*
- Ja, I don't know about statistics, hey.*
- True.*
- I don't know about them so much.*
- Well, it's not going to help if they lie about it. (M)*

Faced with a contradiction, these students are forced into the position of having to change their belief, in which they are invested as it allows them to avoid potential implication in child sexual abuse by

attributing its occurrence to a minority of men who are unlike themselves in that they are mentally ill. Instead, they protect their investment by questioning the statistics which are uncomfortable to accept, and, by implication, accuse the women who reported them of lying. As Levett (1989a, p.279) points out, in the mental health literature also, statistics are not regarded as a "true" reflection of social reality, and these types of attitudes support the students' point of view.

#### **b) FORENSIC SAMPLE**

Studies appear to suggest that the sexual offender is not likely to be more pathological than any other man (e.g. Amir, 1971). According to Zabow (1990, personal communication,) from his experience in the forensic unit at Valkenberg Hospital, sexual offenders are rarely found to be mentally ill. In an undocumented study of two hundred rapists in 1982, he found that only two were found to be unfit to stand trial. In the case of rape, since it is usually planned, adjusted according to circumstances and common, it appears to fulfill many of the criteria for "normal" behaviour (Bauermeister, 1977). Child sexual abuse may fit these criteria as well.

The opinion that there is a relatively low incidence of mental illness in sexual abusers is confirmed by the forensic sample, only four of whom were found to be unfit to stand trial. In considering this it is important to take into account the fact that in this population there is a high percentage of pathology, as men are only sent to these wards by the courts when there is some doubt as to their fitness to stand trial. This could occur due to inappropriate behaviour during court, or due to an unusually bizarre alleged offence. According to Zabow, (1990, personal communication), his undocumented research on admissions to the forensic unit between 1981 and 1988 revealed that 50% of patients were found to be mentally ill. The low incidence of mentally ill offenders in relation to this could be related to the nature of their act. It is also possible that wide-spread concern with regard to child sexual abuse and the way in which it is viewed as abnormal, could lead it to be seen by the courts as strange behaviour requiring investigation. It is interesting to note, for example, that of ten sexual offenders admitted to one of the forensic wards during the time period with which this study was concerned, eight were under observation for child sexual abuse.

In this unit, men have an investment in portraying themselves as mentally ill, and, indeed, often do, as this is a means by which they can possibly avoid going to prison. Surprisingly, only one of the men in the forensic sample used mental illness as an excuse. He, however, at first denied his alleged offence, the

rape of his daughter, using mental illness as an excuse to explain his inability to recall the act of which he is accused. By the end of the interview, he admitted to the possibility of having committed the offence, but blamed his wife for it (for making him "sick", for abusing alcohol and for neglecting what he saw as her role in the home):

*"Ja, is dit nou so, as ek die kind verkrag, dan se ek dit is deur haar dat die ding gebeur, dis deur haar dat ek siek is, en deur haar dat die dinge gebeur. Verstaan mevrou? Deur haar! (F16)*

Most of the men accused of child sexual abuse avoid the potential stigma of mental illness by instead drawing on other excuses and justifications which serve the function of presenting their act as uncharacteristic, by denying the alleged offence completely or by trying to implicate the victims by drawing on discourses around sexual misuse which blame the woman or child involved. In this way they seek to deny the alleged offence by discrediting women, to whom madness is at times more frequently attributed, as witnesses. These justifications will be discussed more fully in the section entitled "Silence".

## 2.2 ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

### a) STUDENTS

4% of the categorized statements refer to the use of alcohol or drugs as an excuse for sexually abusing children:

*1) These dark fantasies which he normally keeps in check by moral restraints are let out by the loosening of inhibitions that excessive alcohol consumption creates, and when an object for these fantasies appears he takes advantage of it. (114)*

*2) This could be the case of a person who continually fantasizes about young children and when under the influence of things like alcohol or drugs loses all control and goes on to abuse children. (116)*

*3) - So now they've got like a, by saying that they've been drinking or, high on drugs, that's sort of an excuse, you know. They weren't aware of what they were doing, but actually might have been, so they say, it's circumstances beyond your control, to get you off or whatever. (W)*

*4) When under the influence of alcohol, these men are able to sexually misuse children because of the fact that their senses are dulled, and as a result their so-called inhibitions would be suppressed. (140)*

In these statements, the excuse of alcohol or drug use serves a similar function to that used by rapists in Scully and Marolla's (1984) study, who by using this excuse were able to dissociate themselves from their offences, allowing them to see themselves as "not responsible" and "nice guys".

#### **b) FORENSIC SAMPLE**

This excuse was used in a similar way by men in the forensic sample. Since the introduction of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, Act 1 of 1988, the use of alcohol is no longer permissible as a defence by which to avoid responsibility. The following accounts of three forensic patients, however, show the way in which the use of alcohol or drugs as an excuse allows them to view their behaviour as uncharacteristic.

*He says it is not "his thing" to have sex with children. It only happened because he was very drunk. (F5)*

*He says he doesn't have a big problem. He can solve it by staying away from drugs. Exposing himself is not the problem - it's drugs. (F26)*

*He says he has been asking himself why he does this after he becomes drunk; as he does have girl friends. (F14)*

The first of these statements was made by a man who subsequently received the death sentence for the brutal rape of a child. In court he used alcohol abuse as his defence. His ability to distance himself from his offence in this way allowed him to attempt to avoid taking responsibility for his actions. The third statement suggests a sense of need for sexual gratification which is simply misdirected as a result of alcohol abuse. This statement refers to the discourse of privilege which will be discussed in a separate section.

## **2.3 DEVELOPMENT**

#### **a) STUDENTS**

The idea of a sexual abuser who has himself been sexually abused as a child is pervasive in psychological literature, as has already been mentioned. 6% of the categorized statements make reference to this. As only one of the students in the sample reported even a second hand account of being sexually abused,

this discourse allows them to view sexual offenders as being unlike themselves. Several of the students see the sexual abuse of offenders as children as being causative:

*1. As already mentioned in intrafamilial sexual abuse a male guilty of sexual abuse may justify his actions through saying that if he went through this kind of abuse why shouldn't someone else? (102)*

*2. -Or maybe they were abused, maybe they were abused as children.  
-And they're getting their own back, or what? (M)*

*3. The same thing that he is doing now has happened to him in the past. The man wishes to make good for what has happened to him, and so molests the child. (122)*

The effect of childhood sexual abuse on its subsequent perpetrators is explained in terms of power relationships and punishment, thus inserting the motivation of the offender within the discourses of male supremacy. This is, however, an unsatisfactory explanation, as male on male violence perpetrated by father onto son is unable to explain the gender - related dynamics inherent in the sexual abuse of female children by men. As has already been mentioned, the causative interpretation of this explanation is also inadequate, as it fails to explain the fact that most children who are sexually abused are girls, while sexual abusers themselves are very rarely female.

#### b) FORENSIC SAMPLE

No men in the forensic sample referred to their own experience of sexual abuse as an excuse for their actions. It is possible that instead of focussing on themselves and their own families, it is more convenient for these men to blame the children and women involved, drawing on explanations which are commonly used. These will be discussed more fully in the section entitled "Victim Blaming".

## 2.4 CLASS

#### a) STUDENTS

One of the commonly held ideas about rape is that it is a working class phenomenon. Some researchers, e.g. Amir (1971) have targetted the working class as being rape prone. This was based on demographic

details of rapes, which do not necessarily reflect the actual incidence and distribution of rape across classes. It is likely that similar stereotypes surround the sexual abuse of children. References to this discourse were present in 4% of the identified statements:

*1. The intra-familial sexual misuse of children occurs most frequently in lower class large families (with younger children especially) as over-crowding is rife and sexual molestation becomes easy and convenient. (102)*

*2. Fathers, frustrated from a long day at the office where there is a lack of satisfaction, coming home to a starving family in a poverty stricken area, could be totally frustrated, taking his anger out on a defenceless child could lead to sexual misuse. (106)*

*3. -It often happens in terribly overcrowded families ... in overpopulated groups you get, one room with about 8 or 9 people sleeping in one room. So there're 4 people sleeping in one bed, and you often get father and son abusing the daughter, because they're all ... in the same bed. (W)*

*4. Poverty, although not a justification, adds to the problem, bad socialisation, loose morals, lack of material satisfaction and alcoholism and drug abuse also aggravate the situation. (117)*

*5. -But I suppose it all depends on what what sort of slice of Western society you're going to take, you know, 'cos I mean I'm sure in the sort of, higher class, incest doesn't happen. (L)*

*6. Illiterate lumpen proletariat have a very high incidence of child abuse. When one knows no better and social norms are irrelevant in the daily fight for food one can well expect this. (131)*

*7. -You see what I would say is that it's definitely a social thing, if you are on the lower rungs of the wage earners, where it seems that a lot of [rape and incest] happens, and they don't have moral or [in..].*

*- You know you read, say in ghettos or [in...] maybe even in the townships here in South Africa, where there's a lot of incest [in...]*

*-Ja but I think it happens in all sort of classes in society, but you just don't hear about it because in the lower classes you hear more about it.. (F)*

The class prejudices of these predominantly white, middle class men allow them to dissociate themselves and the people who are most familiar to them from the sexual misuse of children. Within the South African context, these comments also take on racial overtones, although they are not directly couched in such terms. The equation of the working class with loose morals, ignorance and alcoholism is convenient for those who do not wish to be implicated themselves and indicative of prejudices associated with discourses pertaining to class. As with rape, the sexual abuse of children is unlikely to be conveniently confined within class boundaries, but rather pertains to all sectors of society, as is suggested by a group member in the last extract.

## b) FORENSIC SAMPLE

The majority of the men admitted to the forensic unit at Valkenberg Hospital are Black or "coloured" working class men. The present sample is reflective of this. 75% of the white men in this sample were from working class backgrounds. This is unlikely to be a reflection of a higher incidence of sexual misuse of children by working class men, but rather a reflection of the fact that generally the majority of men sent to the forensic wards at Valkenberg Hospital for psychiatric observation are from working class backgrounds. (Zabow, 1990, personal communication.)

There could be numerous reasons for this, one of which might be that they cannot afford the services of private psychiatrists to give evidence for them in court. None of the men in this sample used class as an excuse, possibly for reasons similar to those suggested under "Development".

## 2.5 MEDIA

### a) STUDENTS

The potential influence of the media on child sexual abusers was referred to by 3% of the statements, but was also addressed in three of the groups.

1. Accounts of people's sexual lives are reported in our newspapers which eventually leads to people having a derogatory image about women. (120)

*2. Negative stereotypes (women in pornography films) should be removed, so that such acts no longer occur. (122)*

*3. I have always been acutely affected by the overt sexuality displayed in adverts, shop windows, magazines, films and by women themselves. (130)*

*4. I acknowledge that within most men there is a desire for sexual conquest and dominance which is evidenced by the huge market for pornography world-wide which I suspect is bought by a 95% male audience. I myself will admit strictly confidentially to being aroused by pornographic books and magazines, although the transition from fantasy to reality is*

*one I will never make, because of my cognitive conception of the moral degradation and decadence inherent therein. (114)*

*5. All forms of media constantly attack the brain with a schema of a society in turmoil - wars, murders, suicide, multiple motor accidents etc., the list is endless, and there is no doubt in my mind that it precipitates more violence. (131)*

While many students are critical of the media, the third and fourth statements suggest the effect of the media on these students personally. For others, the portrayal of women in the media has a powerful effect, which may not be admitted or which might remain unacknowledged. Striking examples of this are references to thirteen-year old Mandy Smith's relationship with Rolling Stone Bill Wyman, which had received recent media coverage and which was discussed in three of the groups, as well as discussion of Roman Polanski's involvement with a minor. The student's comments on this reveal their identification with the male involved.

- *That doesn't always occur, I mean there are times, must be times where the child, you know is is a party to it. I mean, I mean, I feel...*
- *But then I don't think that would be classified as abuse.*
- *What about, what about that that you know that that Rolling Stones guy had a thirteen year old girlfriend whatever.*
- *Ja, so...*
- *Roman Polanski.*
- *And, and I mean you know, is that misuse of children? ...*
- *Ja [in...]*
- *Well I... did last week's session with a whole lot of girls discussing these issues and they seemed to confirm that ... at that age, the young age of 14 years, you know, it's a whole big ego trip to go out with an older guy whose got a car, you know, like who's old, who's out of school, it's a big ego trip, you know, irrespective of whether you really like him or not. And, I mean, a lot of the 14 year old girls they go out with a guy like Roman Polanski, he's a millionaire, you know what I mean, they don't think twice.*
- *Ja.*
- *[pause]*
- *Ja, I know, and you know basically there you're going taking advantage of someone who's not in the know and, well, the state still protects them because at that stage they're still regarded as [in...] (H)*

The members of another group have similar sentiments:

- *Anyway it was the fact he, he started having a relationship with this girl, she was thirteen years old, and now she's told everybody. Now if you see a picture of this girl when she was thirteen, I mean, she's just obviously so mature and like (cough)...three years under the legal age for [in...] allowed to have sex, but she looked, I mean she looks nice but she she had nothing against it, her mother had nothing against it and now they're trying to prosecute him.*
- *It's Wyman*
- *Ja I think it's Wyman*
- *Wyman, Bill Wyman*
- *Anyway now they're trying to prosecute him um the guy's terrified, he's he's left England um now I mean that's actual child molesting, it's ..(in).. sexual abuse of children, 'cos she is by law a child, but you should have seen this girl she's totally mature.*
- *[Cough]*
- *Typical girl. (L)*



The effects of the media on influencing discourses related to child sexual abuse are important and could have far-reaching implications considering the research, for example, of Malamuth, and Check (1981), already mentioned.

#### **b) FORENSIC SAMPLE**

One of the alleged offenders reported that he has a pornographic collection of pictures of young girls and used this for masturbatory fantasies. (F24) Apart from this, no reference to the media was made by forensic patients. Without further information it is difficult to account for this, but it is possible that the men in the forensic sample did not have access to the discourses contained in academic literature on the subject, on which the students may have drawn.

### **3. JUSTIFICATIONS**

73% of the students' statements reflect ways in which men might justify their actions by arguing that what they did was acceptable in some way. The kinds of reasons which they give represent a body of beliefs which appear to be commonly held, and which combine to control women and girls in patriarchal society and stop them from stepping over male-defined boundaries. These justifications are complex and inter-linked and help to protect the offender from taking responsibility for his actions, because in some way they are viewed as "natural", given the circumstances under which they occurred. As will be discussed, all five discourses under this heading were referred to by the forensic sample as well as by the students.

#### **3.1. VICTIM BLAMING**

##### **a) STUDENTS**

17% of the statements categorized from the students' essays blamed the victim - suggesting the wide-spread nature of beliefs about female responsibility for sexual abuse. The implications of such beliefs are far-reaching, particularly in the light of Scully and Marolla's (1984) and Vogelmann's (1987,

1990) research on rapists, all of whom found that blaming the victim allowed the men in their samples to see their crime as justifiable and in fact permitted them to avoid responsibility for their acts. The writing and talk of subjects in the present study suggests that victim blaming is likely to apply to child victims as well.

While blaming adult rape victims for provocative behaviour or dress has been widely documented, it might be expected that children's behaviour would be treated differently. For example, Jackson and Rushton, (1982, p. 24) note that while in accounts of family violence women are often blamed, this is not the case with children:

*"Women are seen as fully competent members of society and therefore possess sufficient manipulative knowledge to organize the reactions of others; children are seen as lacking the social knowledge to invite violence, and are seen as provoking but not provocative."*

However, this is not the impression gained from many of the students' statements, and even when children are seen as not consciously provocative, the man is nevertheless seen as justified in sexually abusing them. This is because even if the child is not aware of it, the man might experience her behaviour or dress as being in some way seductive.

Restrictions on the dress and behaviour of adult women appears to be equally expected in children. Dress which the students view as potentially leading to justified sexual abuse includes "wearing pyjamas, costume, underwear etc.", "not dressing properly", "walking around in revealing clothing" and "dressing seductively." What this constitutes remains vague and undefined. Behaviour which is deemed open to be interpretation as provocation includes: "appearing more adult than she is", "idealizing male teachers", "unconsciously stroking the man's leg in an expression of affection", "teasing", "coming to her father to be bounced on his knee", "flirting", "being coy and provocative", "not protecting her modesty", (e.g. sitting with her knees apart and thighs exposed), "inviting" sexual abuse", "gestures of friendliness from a scantily dressed young girl", "being physically attractive", "understanding what the man is doing" (indicated by an undefined response, and thus signifying that she wants to be sexually abused), "feeling adult, special and flattered", "looking at pornographic pictures and books with the man", "a smile or a touch", "any expression of love", "willing participation", (i.e. not resisting), and having had sex with other men.

It is evident that these restrictions are vague and encompass a wide variety of behaviours. They all signify that the girl is willing and therefore responsible for being sexually abused, therefore justifying the perpetrator's action. In addition, sexual abuse may be seen as a punishment to the victim for stepping beyond the bounds of these restrictions, thus forcing her to submit to them in future, regardless of whether she was aware of them or not. Sexual abuse is seen in this way as a means of controlling women and girls to keep them behaving within the bounds of what is seen as acceptable male-defined behaviour.

*-She's always the, the female always seems to be the object of the negative element in this kind of thing, that's always the female's problem, because she was wearing a mini-skirt or because... that kind of thing.  
-Well I think I agree with you guys, I was just thinking... [in...] I think that's the best explanation. It comes to mind that basically what a man thinks of a woman, that's where it starts. (F)*

What a man thinks of a woman is often in terms of objectification, as this student, although critical of this, makes clear:

*-You know, I don't know how many of my friends they say, oh you know, fools women, women are "dof" and this. How can you say that I mean it's, just because it's been a popular message for so long that women are little bubble-headed things that follow you around. (H)*

The same discourses as generally apply to adult women can, in the present text, be seen as being applied to female children. There is a slight difference: girls are generally seen as sexually inexperienced and in the process of learning the rules and prohibitions to which all women are seen to be subject. This, however, does not excuse them. If they are seen as transgressing while they are in the process of learning, the man is viewed as nevertheless feeling justified in sexually misusing them.

However, they can also be seen to be caught between two contradictory discourses: the virgin/whore dichotomy, within which most women are expected to function, that is, being desirable to the men who consider themselves to have rights over their sexuality, without being seen as sexual beings by others. Children's socialization is seen as having a two-fold function: they are required to learn how to "protect their modesty" so that they cannot be viewed as provocative, at the same time as learning how to attract and seduce men. This is viewed as the "natural" order of things, and it is within this that the contradictory nature of the discourse becomes clear. The impossible position in which women are placed in relation to this discourse are reflected in extreme suggestions such as the following by H.L. Mencken (quoted by Dworkin, 1981, p.111):

*"The way to put an end to the gaudy crimes that the suffragist alarmists talk about is to shave the heads of all the pretty girls in the world, and pluck out their eyebrows, and pull their teeth, and put them in khaki, and forbid them to wriggle on dance floors, or to wear scents, or to use lipsticks or to roll their eyes."*

The contradiction within which female children are placed is illustrated well by the following extract from a student's essay:

*Little girls are often extremely provocative in their actions, "flirting" with older males in a way that is unashamed because, of course, they do not realize the full extent of their actions. Female children tend to copy their mother in the natural process of social learning. Thus a little girl may employ the same provocative gestures that the mother uses healthily and naturally in front of her spouse. The mother may be coy and provocative in the natural course of attracting her husband, and she is no doubt fully aware of the implications of her actions. If the child craves affection, she might also act provocatively in front of the father (or other male). However this could lead to the male being sexually aroused and he might justify any subsequent sexual abuse of the child on the grounds that she was encouraging him. (112)*

It appears that the child is seen as having to learn what is viewed as "natural" provocative behaviour, while at the same time ensuring that she does not display it, as it may be misinterpreted. In the above extract, the hypothetical offender's helpless "victim" position in the face of the child's "unconsciously provocative" behaviour is striking, and allows him to avoid taking any responsibility for his actions whatsoever. In other statements, a strong element of blame is evident: the child is portrayed as calculating to seduce the man, and therefore deserving of whatever the consequences might be:

*1. Another teacher I know tells of how pubescent girls who do not yet know any boys often idolize their male teachers, and go out of their way to secure their affections (99)*

*2. Undoubtedly, I think that there are a number of precocious young girls who are aware of their virginal, pure image and the attraction that it draws, and deliberately lead a man, whom they regard as being someone who can be easily bluffed, on in order to see his uneasy response. (101)*

*3. - Ja, I suppose though, the girl has to be like innocent, but..*

*- She has to know, she has to know that it's wrong.*

*- How will she know?*

*- I mean I know, I know for a fact that in um Berlin there's, there's a whole thing, it's where there's just sort of girls under 16 years old, and prostitutes, you know what I mean.*

*- Oh, yes.*

*- And they're all under like you know, they all start at twelve years old and that. (L)*

While perceived lack of innocence is seen as a justification for sexual abuse, the mere fact that the child is a child and sexually naive is also seen as a motivating factor for an offender who is attracted by this and therefore sexually abuses the child:

*4. This is particularly the case where younger girls are involved, since it has been said that to a male, a girl's body which has not yet reached full development is far more sexually attractive than one whose body has. (132)*

*5. They look for people who are young, not because they are always likely to submit but because they are still likely to be virgins. Men feel proud when they break someone's virginity. Unfortunately most of the virgins are children so it is likely that they can be targets. (133)*

In other statements, sexual abuse is seen as justified when the child does not object:

*6. - Or you could argue that, say now in the case those children, 13 and 14 years old, you could argue that they agree with many of the things that he did wrong, offer their own justification. They're old enough to know what was right and what was wrong.  
-Probably like child curiosity will just do ...he'll say do whatever and then they'll do it...  
They won't sort of object to something new, they'll do it and therefore, as there are no objections he'll think to himself, oh they don't really mind, so might as well carry on, you know. (L)*

*7. Here the dividing line between innocent child and sexual sophistication becomes increasingly vague (130)*

*8. -Some "ou" could think that every girl has a secret fantasy of being raped and he will do her a favour and do it. (laughter)  
-Jesus, it's disgusting.  
-Well, that's a justification, if you're looking for one, you know.  
-That's often put forward as; that women do have a fantasy about being raped.  
-And that they dress to be raped...dressed to kill. (M)*

The students appear to be able to enter easily into the discourse of blame:

*- "She had it coming to her"  
-Ja, "she deserved it" ...  
-she transgressed and we have taken it into our hands to dispense this law [in...] we make ourselves....  
-That's more, I don't think we're thinking in those terms; that's really high above a lot of them. I'd say it's more basic than that.  
-So it's like an urge, you know; she walks past, she's got sexy legs.  
-Ja, she's wearing jogging shorts so obviously she wants it. (W)*

In the statements and groups, although some of the students are critical of the discourse which they cite, many can be seen to be invested in it. The contradictory nature of this discourse is addressed in one of the groups, but the man who questions it meets with opposition:

- ... I've been to Sandy Bay many times, hey, and I've seen very attractive women there, and like if I can keep myself in control, why can't someone else?  
 -You're not someone else.  
 -Unfair statement.  
 -Huh?  
 -Unfair statement.  
 -No, there's no question of unfair statement.  
 -Ja, it is an unfair statement  
 - No, no, no, listen because..  
 -It is an unfair statement 'cos you I mean  
 -You're judging others by yourself.  
 -I'm not judging others by myself, I'm just saying that, you know, if courts can blame someone that a woman's attracting sex, I'm sorry, it lies with that man, because ... if she can evoke rape, then she'll do it to all. It's that guy specifically that did it, it's evoked in him... the fault lies with him, I'm sorry, the fault lies... (H)

In the students' victim blaming statements are contained elements of the discourses elicited by Scully and Marolla (1984): Nice girls don't get raped, she asked for it, she got what she deserved. The latter is illustrated by statements which see offenders as justifying sexual abuse by seeing it as a punishment for deviant behaviour:

1. *These men also see themselves as teachers teaching the child a lesson in not becoming too familiar or also for her dressing habits, mannerisms etc. (102)*
2. *Alternatively the child may deliberately flaunt her sexuality. Her precocity could have several consequences. She could entice the male, or get more than she bargained for if the male's response is as ominous as the one expressed in the thought "Well, sweetie, if that's the game you're playing, let me show you what it's really all about. (129)*
2. *Physical harm and degradation of the victim may also lead the man to perpetration as a means of retaliating against children for their disobedience and general lack of discipline. (110)*

These statements also show how women and girls are controlled through sexual misuse, as well as the way in which sexual abuse can be viewed as an assertion of power and an expression of the man's perceived right to sexual gratification. These issues will be further in the sections entitled "Power" and "Drive".

## b) FORENSIC SAMPLE

In the accounts of the men in the forensic sample, explicit or implied blame is frequent. For example, in the account of one man accused of sexually misusing his sister:

*He initially said that she had persistently asked him but later said that he had also been willing. He knows it was wrong what he did, but she had initiated it. (F8)*

Others are also able to see their behaviour as justifiable because of the child's perceived compliance:

*The child was willing "to give him the stuff" and slept with him. He doesn't think he really forced her, although he did persuade her verbally. At the time he felt that there was nothing wrong as he was just being entertained. (F19)*

*He saw two girls going into the changing "hokkie" (at the swimming pool) He then went into the "hokkie", they unlocked the door for him. He pulled down his pants. They shouted, he pulled up his pants and went home. (F25)*

Another man who admits attempting to persuade a five year old girl to perform fellatio with him, although he claims that he was unsuccessful, is reported as saying:

*Since his early twenties, he has frequently attempted to have oral sex with one or two year old children of friends by offering them sweets or pictures to show them. (F24)*

It may be that their acceptance of his offer would have been interpreted as a justification of sexual abuse due to their perceived compliance. Another example is the case of a man accused of ongoing incest with his three daughters:

*It began in October 1987, firstly with the oldest daughter whom he claims was compliant to the point of purchasing the condoms. The second daughter found out and approached him and he "showed her" too. He also had intercourse twice with the youngest daughter, but felt that she was too young and that he would wait until she was a more appropriate age...After one of the testings he accused his daughters of framing him, saying that they asked him to have sex with them so that they could get him into jail. The reason for this is that they will then be free to go sleeping with their boyfriends, which he is sure they are doing now." (F13)*

Two patients who denied their offences nevertheless blamed the child involved:

*A neighbour asked the patient to look after his two daughters, not sure how old they are, but both are at school. He says he was watching TV and both pulled their pants down. (F19)*

*He says that the [eight year old] child has always been aware of sexual matters. She has been attending blue movies and shebeens with her father..... Her mother is somebody who "brings the children up in bed." (F22)*

One of the forensic cases who was interviewed at first denied having raped his daughter. He nevertheless cast aspersions on her character:

*Hulle se die kind is nou verkrag. Dan se ek dis iemand anders buitekant. Hoekom se ek so, mevrou? Daai twaalfjarige kind. Sy rook. As sy begin rook, wat kan ek maar doen mevrou? Heeltyd kry ek en my vrou stry oor daai kind. Sy maak moeilikheid. (F16)*

The other forensic patient who was interviewed saw himself similarly in a victim role and blamed the girls involved. His alleged offence was that he exposed himself and masturbated in front of a fifteen year old school-girl who was sitting in a car in town. Avoiding taking responsibility for this incident, he set the scene by beginning his account with events that occurred early that morning:

*It happened when I came back from the station, and on the station... I saw a woman dressed in pants, she didn't have any jersey on her to cover her..uh... you know, to cover her bottom part or anything, so I couldn't help it but I looked at her and saw how she was all like exposing herself and I thought by myself, you know, it's wrong to do that because I'm a married man and must think of my family and my wife. So then I left. I was walking towards the Parade and when I came at the Parade I saw another girl, you know, standing at the bus stop with books in her hand and she was also more or less dressed like that. Then I tried very hard to control myself but there was something in my mind, dunno, something that told me, you know, that I had to look at her.*

*- This other girl?*

*- This other girl. But I forced myself to let go and just go home, and as I was walking, you know, I couldn't, I couldn't stop looking uh thinking of this girl, and when I crossed the street towards (shop) I just saw somebody, a woman or a girl, you know, sitting in a car...just went straight up to her to ask her if she isn't interested in me. And while I was busy talking to her, you know, she locked the door, and she began yelling at me. So you know, I got scared.... (F12)*

## **3.2. DRIVE**

### **a) STUDENTS**

This discourse was evident in approximately 15% of the categorized statements. Sexual drive which needs expression was often viewed as natural and was rarely questioned. However the fact that most



cases of sexual abuse are planned makes it difficult for this discourse to hold true. For example, in the case of rape, Amir (1971) found that 71% of rapes were planned, and 11% partially planned.

The pervasiveness of this discourse is suggested by one subject:

*1. This excuse is used by all of us in varying degrees - there seems to be a dichotomy between what we "know" is right and what we actually do - the act varying only in degree. (130)*

But despite what he "knows" is right, he continues by saying:

*2. This kind of impulse justification is likely to be the most common because it is easy to verbalize as well as being relatively true. (130)*

There was generally little variation in statements referring to male sexual drive:

*3. Thus after building up a huge sexual urge, he may go out and sexually abuse a child because she is all he can get (106)*

*4. The act could be justified simply because the person felt the urge, released the tension and did not feel any guilt. (106)*

*5. Men such as these often feel proud because they have shown how masculine they are and that their powerfully potent sexual urge was irrepressible and had to be given expression. (110)*

*6. Yet another justification might be, that the aggressor could not control the sexual urges within his body, and that he was led on by the child. (115)*

*7. The man might say "I know it was wrong, but I'm a red-blooded man. I couldn't help myself." (129)*

*8. Men usually, if after seeing something sexually attractive, begin to lust after that thing or person. (132)*

These statements can be viewed as a reflection of the way in which such views of male sexuality are seen as "natural" and "true" and are disseminated throughout society. Levett (1989a) reveals the similar pervasiveness of this discourse in the talk of these students' female contemporaries, who are positioned as the objects of it. This discourse combines with victim blaming to allow the man to see himself within a helpless position, thus placing responsibility on the shoulders of the women or girls involved. An example of this is the only self-disclosure of having sexually abused a child in the students' essays. After

excusing his action by referring to difficult social circumstances, doing his national service and having been evicted from his house by his mother, as well as having abused alcohol before the incident occurred, the student went on to write:

*During the party she came and sat on my lap and eventually the alcohol and sexual frustration of the last six months got the better of me, and I became aroused. We ended up having sexual intercourse but after the first few minutes something in me snapped and the guilt made me leave the room. (117)*

The male sexual drive discourse can also be seen as a site of contradiction. While many students remain positioned within it, the effectiveness of educational input which questions widely held beliefs is illustrated by the following extracts from groups:

*1.- Very often in a rape case, you hear the kind of things like, I couldn't help it, or I lost my self control, or because she was wearing this or she was wearing that; and also together with that, men are obviously a lot more powerful physically. But I'm wondering, this sense that you find men losing their control, they couldn't help it kind of thing, what do you say about that?*

*-Well you probably mention things like women, really, in a rape case, before the actual incident takes place, [in...] the women are probably dressed in a way which provokes the man to go for it. That's one, and secondly, the men do not resist, you know, therefore he shows his reaction [in...] to a female. (F)*

*2. -And as that woman said in our last course, on, when she was talking about women in society, the (biggish one) and she said that there's a, the excuse men also use, I think, is that they can't control their sexuality, do you remember that? And she said that's rubbish.*

*-[She said] why is no-one attacking me now?*

*[laughter]*

*-I nearly got up and said (pant, pant)*

*[laughter]*

*[in...]*

*-But I think that is rubbish...*

*-Well it's like that whole thing that men say, oh, once I'm erect, I have to, have to have sex, because otherwise I'm going to explode or something gross, it's going to fall off or something. So the girl says OK I'll have sex with you just to, you know, I don't want you to...*

*-Ja, they scare the girl [sometimes]*

*-Mmm, mm.*

*-"They" [laughter] Hesitate to say "we." (W)*

In this exchange, the students' investment in the objectification of women is evident in their response to the woman they discuss. At the same time, they question the male sexual drive discourse, attempting to disassociate themselves from it while reluctantly admitting their part in it.

## b) FORENSIC SAMPLE

Reference to the male sexual drive discourse is made by the alleged offender already mentioned who was accused of masturbating in front of a school-girl in the city centre. He places himself firmly in a victim role, and allows himself to see his behaviour as uncharacteristic and beyond his control:

*-I was thinking what I was doing just now, I couldn't believe it... what I asked that girl inside the car....  
 -How do you explain what happened? I mean, why do you think you did what you did on that day?  
 -To tell you the truth, ma'am, it's just a feeling when I saw those girls, you know, I was thinking to myself, I mean, to tell the truth inside me, you know, I thought maybe how would I feel if they were making sex to me or love to me, you know, because the way they were dressing, you know. It was just how I felt at the time. (F12)*

A similar position is taken by other men from this sample:

*He talks about "this feeling coming up in him." (F10)*

*If he had known that it was illegal he isn't sure that he would have been able to resist the pleasure. (F19)*

## 3.3. PRIVILEGE

### a) STUDENTS

Closely allied to the male sexual drive discourse are statements reflecting a sense of privilege, which comprise 15% of the categorized statements. If a man is seen as being unable to control his sexual drive, holding women and girls responsible for arousing him, he is also seen as having the right to sexual gratification. If what are seen as legitimate sexual rights (over his wife) are not available to him, he is seen as having the right of access to other women and children. In fact, male privileges of control are seen as being exercised by all men over all women and girls:

*1. Of course, the person who initiated the sexual abuse could always blame his actions on the fact that he needed immediate sexual gratification and thus abused the child - because the child was the only person who was there at the time to fulfil these needs. (97)*

2. *When he therefore comes across with a woman, he finds that at some stage he is "entitled" to inject his penis into the female parts. This is an idea which would come to him regardless of the age of the woman i.e. whether a girl or a woman. (119)*

3. *Although "at the back of his mind" he'll feel that he is doing something wrong, indecent, he will have little or no guilt about it; after all, he is only taking what is rightfully his. (108)*

4. *-Okay, if you had to do it - how would you justify it?*

*-I couldn't, I honestly wouldn't..*

*-That's, that's because you wouldn't do...*

*- [Interruption] Come on, who you trying to kid here?*

*-But say someone else, who's just found a child that, that was in a situation that could be abused and they found themselves in that situation and they couldn't hold themselves back, then they could say, ay, they just wanted to.*

*-No, we're not arguing the why of the matter, it's the justification.*

*-Hey, the justification is because they wanted to, because their mind said "Go and fuck that woman, ek se. (M)*

5. *The mother may even at a semi-conscious level approve of her daughter being her husband's partner in sex because she (the wife) feels pleased that even if she can't oblige her husband, at least he is being satisfied (101)*

If women are seen as responsible for controlling the male sexual drive, men also see them as being the "natural" objects of it. If a man becomes sexually aroused and sees himself as incapable of controlling his sexual urges, he also sees himself as justified in having sexual intercourse or sexually abusing any woman or girl in the vicinity. Wives are viewed as having a duty to have sexual intercourse with their husbands, for if they refuse, their daughters are likely to be sexually abused. They are even seen as sanctioning this. Some men see themselves as having the right to have sex with virgins, who are devalued once this has occurred. In its most basic form, the discourse of privilege is expressed in terms of property:

6. *If he feels that the mielies or the harvest he has got that year is the best he might decide not to sell it to the public even if he is a farmer. This also applies to the daughter. The father has a right to get the daughter instead of selling her to the public. (133)*

It is in relation to girls and women as his property that a man's investment in the discourses which allow him to excuse and justify the sexual misuse of children alters:

*-But I wonder if it isn't also the fact that [man normally would] tend to keep quiet about that [sexual misuse] as well.*

*-[in...] Very quiet mostly.*

*-Mm.*

*-You know, think for example that it's your own daughter that's been raped, and what your reaction would be, and whether you would want to keep quiet or..*

*-Ja*

*-Whether you would want to get revenge?*

*-I don't know, I would think I would [in...]*

*- I think I would want to get revenge because I've grown up with this idea that women along with my other possessions are things that I have, I 'have' my daughter, I 'have ' my wife, they are part of my possessions.  
-They're yours. (W)*

These men, who perceive themselves as having rights of ownership over women and girls appear to have an investment in this position, and while they may question it, some are reluctant to give it up. This is illustrated by the conflict in one group with regard to the possibility of a change in the positioning of women:

*-Women have been treated as possessions for a hell of a long time.  
-Are you then going in for a ... are you then saying?  
-I am [laugh]  
-...it's anti-natural, or against the natural law of man.  
-What do you mean, natural?  
-Because I mean don't you think that will have an effect on the production and survival of man as such?  
-What do you mean the survival of man? Man's not going to disappear! (H)*

#### **b) FORENSIC SAMPLE**

The fact that so many of these men are accused of sexually abusing children they knew suggests an investment in this discourse. This was also suggested by the accounts of some of the alleged offenders. Speaking of his wife, one of the patients is reported as saying:

*He says he gets angry when she refuses him and wants to hit her and would tell her that she must allow him to have sex. (F7)*

There are similarities in the report of a second, referring to his girl-friend:

*He said they have intercourse three or four times a month. He would like to have more. It upsets him as she often sends him away when he approaches her. (F9)*

In the account of another, reported for sexually misusing his daughter:

*He claims ignorance of the wrongfulness of his act, as nobody has ever told him, but he now knows that it is a serious crime as the police have told him so. (F13)*

The suggestion that child sexual abuse is not wrong is made by another offender who admitted to undressing a six year old girl and lying on top of her. He is reported as saying:

*"Ek het nie geslaag in die besigheid nie"...He says they were not at all angry with him, and it would not have been reported initially." (F7)*

Another patient reports having been refused sexual intercourse by his wife as a reason for turning to his daughter, echoing some of the students' statements reported above:

*He made sexual advances to his wife, who refused his request. She departed to the toilet at that stage, but failed to return. The patient then instructed his second eldest daughter to undress and lie on the floor. (F14)*

### **3.4 POWER**

#### **a) STUDENTS**

The way in which male offenders assert their power and dominance over women through sexual abuse has been frequently written about (For example, Dworkin, 1981). The function of sexual abuse for men has been seen as the assertion of their dominance over women and girls, to remind them who is in control and to punish those who attempt to step beyond male-defined boundaries, thus threatening the present status quo. 14% of the students' statements referred to this discourse.

*- Ja, once you get into the case of male domination of the female, which is exactly what, [pause] society is portraying, it's males dominating over females. I mean obviously it's lessening, but in almost every aspect we see males dominating over females. Maybe that's the [in..] form of domination.*  
*- Yes, because the fact that women are warned all the time produces ... a picture of fear, and through that fear you control and dominate...*  
*- 'Cause then you're always reliant on the man to go out at night. (F)*

In the case of the sexual abuse of children, power dynamics operate doubly : girls lack power because they are female and because they are children. This allows the offender a greater sense of power, and, because of this, resistance by the children involved is less likely to succeed. Power issues were frequently raised in the students' writing and talk:

1. - In other words, women are meant to be dominated over, if a woman is free, very often you see men letting her know that they want to dominate her. (F)

2. These powers that they have, are related to their concept of 'masculinity' as being the controller; the man in power and authority - hence domination, of being the almost 'God-like' figure who owns his wife and children. (100)

3. - Ja, it's generally ... like the three year old girl getting raped or the two year old baby. Ja.  
- Um.

- That that's radical. It must be just [in..] total power. It's like beating children, like being in total power over them. (L)

4. In such cases violent child abuse is common, a man feeling frustrated can take his anger out on a child, justifying himself by feeling in power and in control of the child and the situation. (106)

5. Initially there is the belief that men use force merely because they are men and that this force is desired by women as a necessary component of intercourse. (107)

6. He may acknowledge that it is cruelly wrong, but after all it is better than taking the chance of raping an adult for example, who might resist, forcing him, the perpetrator, to either kill or seriously injure the victim. (111)

7. I feel that the innocence of a child might attract such a man as well in that he might feel worldly and powerful and in charge whereas with an adult woman he could feel inadequate and confused. (112)

## b) FORENSIC SAMPLE

Few of the alleged offenders directly refer to the power which they felt in relation to their victims. The very act of sexually abusing a child carries with it, however, inherent power dynamics. One of the men admitted that he masturbated three times in front of a group of school girls "purely to see their reaction." (F26)

The fact that few accounts comment directly on power is possibly due to the fact that many of the alleged offenders attempted to deny that any sexual abuse had taken place, while those who admitted their offence tended to place themselves in a victim role and make light of their offence. However, in the patient's accounts, their power over the child victim is quite apparent. For example:

1. He refers to it as a "ligte saak." He gives a simple, devious account of pulling a little girl closer and her head down towards his private parts. (F24)

*2. None of his daughters overtly resisted him, but he feels this may have been because they feared him. (F13)*

*3. He would not allow his daughters to wear make-up, look in a mirror, or bring friends to the house. (F13)*

*4. When the young girl, who was just starting to get breasts, came and stood near him he grabbed her and sat her on his lap, and his erect penis was between her thighs. (F5)*

For those who deny their alleged offence, their power is expressed in the way in which they attempt to undermine the words of the girls and women who reported the incident. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.5 SILENCE**

#### **a) STUDENTS.**

Part of the power which child sexual abusers are seen as experiencing by the students is related to the unlikelihood of the child recounting her experience, or, even if she does, of her being believed, because of her position as both female and a child. 14% of the categorized statements referred to this:

*1. They must be secure in the knowledge that the child victim cannot retaliate easily (123)*

*2. Males, I feel, are opportunists. Society is partially responsible for this, teaching men to monopolize on every opportunity possible. (132)*

Levett (1989a) discusses silence around sexual abuse in relation to the way in which society places a stigma on victims of such acts. She argues that silence is used in part as a strategy by those who have been sexually abused, to retain power and control over potentially being placed in a victim role, with its attendant stigma. Silence then becomes a self-protective strategy. Women and girls pay the price of loss of control over the way they are viewed when they do speak out. In this study, however, the almost guaranteed silence of children especially is viewed by several as a potentially powerful motivating factor for those who sexually misuse children, both strangers and those known to the child. The students' statements take cognisance of this:



3. *Besides the view that no-one will believe a child still holds and therefore a tremendous amount of incest occurs. (120)*

4. *The chances of retribution against the offender are very slim. (123)*

5. *A stranger has his anonymity, while a known man can always be guaranteed of his victim's silence. (129)*

6. *What does a child rapist have to lose, apart from a few years in the "slammer" if the parents get to hear? In any case, the chances of the child relating its experiences of being sexually abused to anyone are very slight. (132)*

#### b) FORENSIC PATIENTS

46% of the forensic patients deny their alleged offences, and 91% of these do so by questioning or undermining the accounts of their alleged victims as well as the women who might be supporting them.

For example:

1. *He claims that in the court he was told that the girl was taken to the doctor to be examined but nothing was found. (F1)*

2. *He denies this and says that it was the child's active imagination. (F20)*

3. *She said that the patient touched her although the patient said she is to him like his own child. He denied having done an indecency. (F12)*

4. *He then said he went for a "wee" and let his zip down. The little girl wanted to go with him but he said she must go and "pee daarbinne". When he finished the girl's mother came rushing in from the house. The woman then told everyone he tried to rape the child. In court he says he asked her why a grown up woman would lie like this. (F15)*

5. *The police said he raped his twelve year old daughter. He said his daughter was in hospital but he doesn't know whether there was evidence of rape. He says he doesn't think it's possible that he could have done this. (F9)*

6. *He had been urinating and showing her his "tollie". She said that he raped her, but he says that he would never do this. (F11)*

7. *He contradicts himself, saying first that the lock was jammed, he leaned over the child to open the door. A security guard saw them and reported that the patient's zip was down. He later said the girl asked him to flatten the seat so that she could lie down because she felt tired. When asked about his wife's report that the girl's father mentioned suspecting his sexually abusing the child before. He denies this because the father did nothing about it then. (F22)*

The exhibitionist who allegedly masturbated in front of a school- girl in the city centre, and who has already been quoted in previous sections, attempted to discredit the girls who reported him and acted as witnesses in court, discounting their testimonies because they are not the testimonies of men.

*-There was walking also men in that area, you know. I just can't get it, you know. My lawyer said to me that I was massaging me, but I mean they would see me, you know. But what I can't get inside me, if I massaged me wouldn't one of the men, you know, beat me or something, you know, tell me what are you doing there?*

*-So who's saying that you were... ?*

*-My lawyer said the witnesses in court said that I was massaging myself.*

*-Who are the witnesses?*

*-It's a girl. He said girls. I don't know if there was two or three girls, but they all said that I was massaging me at that time. But I mean, the other thing is, I'm sorry to say this, but if I was massaging me, wouldn't there, I'm sorry to say the word, wouldn't there be any sperm lying there? I mean any people could see it there. (F6)*

He implies that the words and actions of the men would be believed, physical evidence would be believed, but the words of the girls and women would not.

The attempts of the men in the forensic sample to deny their alleged offences due to lack of evidence suggests an awareness that they may be believed rather than the girls involved. This is consistent with the behaviour of rapists interviewed by Vogelmann (1987,1990), most of whom were very calm after having committed the offence and showed no great haste in leaving the scene of the crime. This suggests a belief that they were unlikely to be reported, and even if they were, that they felt that the act was in any event justified.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In this study, discourses relating to excuses and justifications for child sexual abuse were explored, by examining the writing and talk of two distinct groups of male subjects.

Discourses relating to excuses for child sexual abuse, with the exception of alcohol, were present only in the essays and groups of the male students. It is possible that this is because the male students attempted in part to look for pathology within the offender, his family or socio-economic position, whereas those who had been accused of child sexual abuse instead tended to seek justifications outside of themselves, by blaming or questioning the girls and women involved. It is possible also that the observation cases did not have access to the types of discourses present in the academic literature on the subject, which has been discussed in this study, and on which the students appear to draw.

The justifications offered by the students, however, were shared by the alleged offenders. All five of these discourses: victim blaming, drive, privilege, power, and the silencing of women and girls, relate to the way in which subjects are positioned within society according to gender. The fact that subjects from both of the very different groups drew on these discourses in justifying child sexual abuse, suggests that while the two groups are subject to very dissimilar influences and experiences, there are some commonalities which could reflect aspects of contemporary masculine identity.

In the case of the students, incidents in which these discourses were challenged were included in the discussion. These references to contradictions within discourses are important as they could represent the sites of potential change. In addition, instances in which this change met with resistance were also included. It appears from many of the students' statements that they drew on discourses in which they may be personally invested. It could be that, because of this, change will not be easily accepted.

It is hoped that some insight into the kinds of discourses which are common to both groups has been attained. If change is to occur, knowledge of the nature of discourses which are predominant is important, and more research of this nature is necessary. It would be, however, important to consider the way in which discourses come to be held, and the way in which they are disseminated from one subject to another. This is a complex question, but would be an important direction for future research.

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